

ludlow assemblyrooms

Annual General Meeting of Ludlow and District Community Association Wednesday 15 November 2023 at 6.30pm

MINUTES

1.	<p>Welcome and apologies for absence</p> <p>Present: Members of the Council – L Johnston (Chair)(LJ), Lindsey Mundy (LM), Fiona Morrell (FM), Ruth Napier (RN), Mike Penn (MP), Paul Rew (PR), Jeff Walker (JW), with Members of the Association (Friends), plus staff members including Artistic Director & CEO, Joel Baldwin (JB).</p> <p>Apologies for absence: See attached. I Andronov (IA), J Deakin, (JD), Gareth Williams (GW), Alistair McGowan (AM).</p>
2.	<p>Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 23 November 2022</p> <p>Proposed by LM that in the absence of them having been circulated, any queries could be raised once they were accessible and subsequently noted. Documents can be accessed via: lar.quest/ldca-agm-documents</p>
3.	<p>Chair's Report</p> <p>LJ referred to her report, welcoming the opportunity to reflect on the year that has passed. LJ reminded all that the last AGM was held just before our first fully professional pantomime season, to great success — a packed out auditorium and the building buzzing with excited children and their families. This has set the model that is being repeated this year — with more shows this time!</p> <p>But the pantomime was just one part of a busy schedule — an exciting year with a diverse range of music, theatre, films and streams. The quality of our programme has been exceptional, and LJ thanked Joel for that. LJ also thanked Bill, as both Joel and Bill have been working together to enhance the joint offer of events and food at Bill's Kitchen to the benefit of us all.</p> <p>LARFE has delivered as usual, with a contribution of over £28k to our funds. This is a most significant and vital part of our fundraising efforts. We have also launched our Patrons' scheme and will be developing this further over the next year. Charlotte Page, Jo Brand and Michael Berkeley have been confirmed as LAR's 'Honorary Patrons' and we have 8 new fully paid-up Patrons, two of whom are Lifetime Patrons (six Annual).</p> <p>On behalf of the board of Trustees LJ thanked everyone, our Friends and Patrons, for supporting us financially year in, year out. Our thanks also go to our fundraising committee which works incredibly hard to run successful events each year.</p> <p>LJ said that the staff team were totally committed to our success and work so hard to achieve that. LJ wished to include here Tracey, Finance Officer, who left us this year after 19 years of employment and was one of those who just kept the wheels in motion. And Jolene, Marketing Manager, who supported us well but then had an offer she could not</p>

refuse. But we are truly a volunteer-led organisation. LJ said she cannot thank the volunteers enough — they run the VIC, help with Box Office, sell in our retail space, steward our shows and events, run our bar, help in the office, manage some of our data reporting, produce our posters — the list is long. And they are great ambassadors for us. It might be said every year, but she emphasised that it needs saying: we would not be here without you all.

LJ said they are incredibly grateful for all the donations and bequests they have received. Particular mention needs to be made of two bequests: we received £150k from the estate of the late Renee McKibbin, and a £10k bequest from the estate of the late David Williamson. Some of these funds have enabled us to transform part of our building that did not benefit from the recent major refurbishment project into a high quality second studio. LJ hoped everyone had managed to have a look at this and see the potential this space has for community usage and to enhance our income from private hire. With the arts sector at large being in such an uncertain trading environment, enhancing our income from differing sources is key to our financial viability.

LJ added that Ludlow Town Council has had a long commitment to the LAR, albeit with 22/23 year grants reduced from the previous year but still totalling some £12,500. This includes funds to support the Visitor Information Centre located prominently on the market square. The Trustees have always been very grateful to the Town Council for their support for us. Sadly, LJ said they had recently received notification that the Town Council has chosen not to award any grant funding for next year; we have written to the council to explain the significant impact this will have both on our revenue and our ability to source other grant funding. As the Town Council recognises and appreciates what LAR provides for Ludlow, we are hoping that they will reconsider this decision.

LJ wished to say thank you to Joel Baldwin, our CEO and Artistic Director, who is leaving us soon. Joel has put in so much effort and brought so much energy to the role, and has led on initiatives that will serve us well in the future. For this LJ thanked him and wished him well in his future career.

In these uncertain trading times, we are not looking for a like-for-like replacement for Joel. This financial year represented the first full year of trading post-Covid. Undoubtedly, our audiences have changed. The trustees anticipated that the first full year would be different from past years and budgeted for a contingency fund to cover an increasing gap between income and expenditure. We are currently adapting to this changed fiscal environment. We will be reviewing what the organisation requires over the next few months. In light of this, we are currently putting in place an interim structure to lead and manage the organisation over the next few months. I am pleased to say that Steve Catanach, a volunteer, is going to run the business side of the Assembly Rooms, and Jess, our Marketing Manager, is going to hold the ring with our programming. They too are already bringing energy and effort to their roles. LJ gave thanks on behalf of the board of Trustees to both of them for stepping up to these roles.

- i) Mike Evans asked if Ludlow Town Council had given any reason for cessation of their support. JB answered that the reason given had to do with LDCA not using a separate bank account for the VIC. More recently they said they didn't feel there

	<p>was enough information on what had been achieved. JB advised that they had offered further information and expressed their disappointment.</p> <p>ii) Jennifer Gill asked what sort of figure the Council had previously granted. LJ said that last year it was £12.5K – a significant amount but it also had implications for seeking other grants elsewhere without this local council support. Chris Henry added that last year £5K of this was support for the VIC, CH said LDCA was now effectively running VIC (and the toilets) for the town for nothing. LJ explained that running the VIC fitted in with their community remit (16.5K people had been recorded as visiting the VIC through the year and this was probably an under-recording).</p> <p>Marilyn Gaunt asked whether it would be an idea if all residents of town wrote to the Council to express support for this resource that is publicising the town. LJ welcomed the support if anyone would like to take this action – it was noted that initially LAR had received a grant of £25K on a 3 year rolling contract.</p> <p>Linda Senior wondered if there was any mileage in stressing how much toilets are used as public toilets. E.g. market traders. Particularly when public toilets out of order. LJ agreed that usage was high by non-patrons.</p>
4.	<p>Treasurer’s Report</p> <p>LJ confirmed that LDCA did not currently have a Treasurer in post. Tim Hughes had stepped in when Chris Henry left but was now covering the Finance Officer post on a temporary basis and he still attends Board & Finance Meetings and would return as a Board Member once the post was filled.</p> <p>TH apologised that due to a technical hitch the accounts had not been available for the meeting. LJ assured all that the Accounts would be made available (e.g. lar.quest/lzca-agm-documents) and emailed out.</p> <p>i) James Caird asked about the balance between income and expenditure. TH replied that there had been £630K Income and that the Expenditure, including donations, against this showed a breakeven situation.</p> <p>ii) Tom Evans asked whether there was a cash flow issue. TH advised that the bank situation was healthy.</p>
	<p>Resolution 1 Adoption of Annual Report and Accounts: LJ asked for a default position of them being accepted, subject to them being circulated and any comments being submitted and noted. LJ proposed, Chris Henry seconded. All in favour.</p> <p>Resolution 2: Appointment of Auditors and authorisation of Council Members to fix their remuneration. (The current auditors, DRE Limited, are available for re- appointment). Proposed by LJ and seconded by PR. All in favour.</p>
5.	<p>Council Members</p> <p>Resolution 3: Election of Council Members:</p> <p>Chris Henry, Lara Furniss, and Sue Ripley resigned as Council Members during the year. There is therefore no retirement by rotation required this year. LJ thanked them all for their input, which was much appreciated.</p> <p>Alistair McGowan, Fiona Morrell, Ruth Napier and Jeff Walker were co-opted to the Council as Trustees during 2023. They offer themselves for election at this AGM.</p>

	<p>Proposed by Tim Hughes, seconded by Linda Senior. All in favour.</p> <p>Other Board members are: Igor Andronov (elected 2021), Jodie Deakin (elected 2020), Laura Johnston (re-elected 2022), Lindsey Mundy (elected 2020), Michael Penn (re-elected 2021), Paul Rew (re-elected 2021), and Gareth Williams (re-elected 2022). LJ added that Tim Hughes had stepped down to take the temporary position and will be co-opted back on later in the year.</p> <p>The Board is limited to twelve members; there are presently eleven members; individuals who are interested in joining the Board, please contact the Chair, Lauraj@ludlowassemblyrooms.co.uk who will be pleased to provide further information and explain the induction process.</p>
6.	<p>Report of the Fundraising Committee (LARFE)</p> <p>Andrew Pike spoke to his tabled report advising that over the financial year April 2022 to March 2023, LARFE, the fundraising group of just six volunteers — organised a series of events which raised a record breaking £28,569 for Ludlow Assembly Rooms.</p> <p>The annual Secret Gardens event and biennial Auction of Promises between them raised over £24,000 with the Progressive Lunches (ongoing), Coffee Morning, Bookshelf (ongoing), Winter Quiz and donations adding a further £4,297.</p> <p>AP asked if all who had joined in the Progressive Lunch scheme could complete it, as it could add thousands of pounds more to the total raised so far. AP also reminded everyone to continue bringing in books for the fundraising bookshelf on the main corridor.</p> <p>AP said they were sorry to see Peter Purslow leave the group for health reasons after 21 years. He had been an outstanding support as our treasurer and all-round active participant, attending every meeting, organising country house visits, and helping at all our events. He is a much missed colleague.</p> <p>AP added that more members with ideas and organisational skills are always needed and most welcome to join.</p> <p>AP wished to thank the many Friends and volunteers who support LARFE events in so many different ways, as they couldn't succeed without them and very much appreciated their help in keeping Ludlow Assembly Rooms up and running.</p> <p>LARFE team: Joan Birkett, Shauna Delaney, Chris Evans, Cy Jones, Andrew Pike, Dina Webb</p>
7.	<p>Report of the CEO of Ludlow Assembly Rooms</p> <p>Joel Baldwin spoke to his tabled report, echoing LJ in thanking the Friends, Patrons, supporters, fundraisers, volunteers, and staff team — for everything they contribute. It was a busy and exciting year of activity, change, challenges, and opportunities but, he said, he was surrounded by caring, passionate, skilful, knowledgeable and can-do people that made his role in overseeing the programming and operations here so much easier. Thank you.</p>

JB thanked those members of staff who left us during the course of the year — for their diligent service and for bringing their particular skill set to operations here. It can be unsettling in small organisations like ours when we lose a member of the team as everyone plays such a pivotal role in shaping the wide range of activities we deliver every day, yet we have been fortunate enough to recruit some excellent new members of staff, and our talented and dedicated team of volunteers play an important role too in filling gaps during times of changeover, allowing for greater flexibility in the short-term and organisational resilience in the long-term.

In planning the autumn season last year, JB noticed that there was so much by way of artistic talent both in-house and local to Ludlow that we draw on and could continue to develop alongside. In particular, it was apparent that, in partnership with Jack Ludwig and Ludwig Theatre Arts, there was an exciting opportunity to bring a professional, traditional pantomime to LAR. This kind of large-scale, multi-show production allows us as a full staff and volunteer team to get our teeth into something that delivers huge benefits to local schools, families, and the community as a whole. It was a great success in every way and he was confident it will go from strength to strength each year.

In this way, partnership is key to LAR's success, and it has been a joy to foster closer links with others too such as with the Fringe festival, the piano festival, English Song Weekend, Borderlines film festival, and individual creators, producers, and organisations from a range of backgrounds, styles, and disciplines. In particular, Pentabus have brought various high-quality, visionary productions and activities into the building over the last year and it was hoped that this collaborative partnership continues to evolve next year with more activity from this dynamic theatre company taking place alongside us here.

Quick breakdown of core activities (April 2022 – March 2023)

- 80 live events (129 individual performances), selling 12,024 tickets
- 23 live-streamed events, selling 1,793 tickets
- 129 films (252 individual screenings), selling 7,765 tickets
- Lettings gradually returning to pre-pandemic levels, with space for more
- Significant growth in email marketing lists, website use, and social media engagement

There were some stand-out moments, including firm favourites such as Spooky Men's Chorale, The Manfreds, and Showaddywaddy; world-class folk acts including Eliza Carthy, Leveret, Roddy Wooble, and The Jeremiahs; some truly exceptional classical performances from the likes of Sam Cave, Maki Sekiya, Sofya Gulyak, and Mid Wales Opera; as well as, of course, the Christmas pantomime, Jack and the Beanstalk, which saw 3,868 people through the door, including schools and families that had never been here before.

Some new initiatives included the now regular jazz and folk café pop-ups in Bill's Kitchen, which have been tremendously successful; a variety of talks from adventurers like Simon Parker and Bonita Norris; and some exciting Kickback band nights in Oscars that have been well attended.

Thank you to all the artists, and to those contributing voluntarily to support in the programming, planning, and delivery of all this; there were many excellent performances throughout the year.

Cinema highlights include: Elvis, Top Gun: Maverick, Downton Abbey: New Era, and the sublime spread of films at Borderlines Film Festival, who we are now collaborating with us throughout the year. Family films for the holidays continued to be programmed and Marketing Manager, Jess, has been working hard to build awareness of the amount on offer for children of all ages and their families. The most successful live-streamed event was NT Live's Prima Facie, although the ROH's streams remain popular (The Nutcracker performing particularly well).

JB was encouraged to see many regular classes, lectures, and community-led initiatives return to LAR since it reopened, although there is still capacity for more, and it is a priority that marketing efforts and engagement with local groups to facilitate more of this are continued especially as we now have another excellent room in Studio Two available. It is also encouraging to see many organisations continuing and beginning to utilise our excellent box office ticketing service for external events — another focus for growth and a way in which we can provide a useful, professional service for the wider community.

The Visitor Information Centre continues to be a fantastic volunteer-led resource for the town and brings many people through our doors, averaging over 16,000 enquiries per year; a huge thanks must go to Rosalind and all of those volunteering there. Also, the expertly-curated programme of Exhibitions goes from strength to strength; JB thanked Eliz-anne for the outstanding art she brought to LAR through her hard work and engagement with local artists.

As well as the development of our wonderful new space, Studio Two, other spaces are also being refreshed and reconfigured thanks to the hard work of the core team here, and some handy volunteers. We continue to explore better options for our spaces — especially the way the VIC-Shop-Box Office area is configured (a plan currently being devised in consultation with Steve Catanach) and the bar/area outside Oscars (a plan currently being devised in consultation with an experienced designer and the team here) — to ensure we give the best customer experience and journey through the building, but this is an area that requires some specific funding and support next year.

JB reported that there had been some minor branding updates, website improvements, and general marketing initiatives, including a greater presence on social media channels, which have together resulted in considerable improved traffic, usage of our digital spaces, and more online sales.

Looking to the future

At times when core funding and project grants are harder to come by, JB emphasised how vital it is that we have a strong fundraising team — and LARFE, as ever, has done the most incredible job this last year as Laura highlighted. It is also essential that over the next year we aim for higher levels of Friends membership and build on the recently launched Patrons membership. This will ensure we are able to develop key areas of programming, engage all areas of the community, and continue to operate the building with the wide range of equipment and resources required to be a successful venue for the arts and a centre that welcomes a diverse range of activity for the whole of Ludlow.

JB hoped that people would consider joining as a Patron ('Annual' or 'Lifetime' options) if you can; the new 'Friends & Patrons' flyer also provides a menu outlining ways in which you can give towards specific items and projects, which may be of interest to all our supporters.

JB said that as he looked to delivering our second full-scale pantomime alongside Jack and Ludwig Theatre Arts (and accompanying Christmas show in the new studio for younger families) this year, he was also looking to pastures new, taking up a lectureship alongside some composition and research opportunities in the New Year. He was grateful that already the trustees have recognised the ability of internal talent to hold the reins for the interim and is confident in the skills of everyone here and the wealth of resources available nearby to ensure LAR thrives into the next year and beyond. JB said it had been a pleasure to serve as the Artistic Director and CEO here for the last 18 months and thanked everyone for for all their support over this time, and for all involved in the organisation do ongoing to ensure this wonderful venue thrives. He hoped all that operate within it continue to experience the warmth, fun, beauty, and exceptionally high standard of artistic and community-centred output that it offers.

Mike Evans said it was impressive to hear about the good works being done and wished JB every success. He said he was pleased to see much more marketing coming through, but that it bothered him that there were still a number people don't know it exists. He felt more needed to be done to enhance the entrance and façade. He also said he found it frustrating that Bill's was not always open. JB responded that part of sprucing up the venue is livening up the front of building with lights and images in time for Christmas to make more of a splash. LJ added that Bill's would like to be open every night, but that he needed enough clientele to make it viable every night and that numbers were very variable. LJ said that they are trying to work with Bill's to collaborate with on the programming with a focus on Friday nights.

Bill Sewell clarified that he was open every Friday, every other Monday, and on a Thursday from March onwards with a Games Night. He suggested people could keep in touch by joining the mailing list.

Jennifer Gill asked whether any activities and films are being programmed for those with dementia or the visually-impaired. LJ explained that the A Life More Ordinary project had been run with specific grant funding. LJ said she was keen to source more funding to support this and widen it to more groups, as was so successful and she understood many would be missing it. **Action: J Gill to meet with LJ to discuss further.**

JB added that they have added captioned screenings to some films for the hard of hearing and had received great feedback on this, and that they were also going to programme more accessible shows with relaxed performances for theatrical productions, and will explore options for those visually-impaired.